

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 INRE-00 MCT-01 HA-05 AID-05
CCO-00 FBOE-00 OC-06 OPR-02 USSS-00 CA-01 A-01
SCS-06 OMB-01 SY-05 /101 W
-----040697 181050Z /21

O R 180835Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4020
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMCONSUL MUNICH
AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY SANA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
USIA WASHDC
AMEMBASSY WARSAW

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PROP, PEPR, BU, US, XH, XF
SUBJECT: POSSIBLE DEMONSTRATION BY ARAB STUDENTS

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REF: A) 77 SOFIA 2519 (NOTAL), B) SOFIA 77

1. SUMMARY: BULGARIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
WARNED JAN 17 OF POSSIBLE ARAB AND AFRICAN STUDENT
DEMONSTRATION AGAINST EMBASSY AND DESCRIBED SECURITY
PRECAUTIONS TO BE TAKEN, WHICH WOULD ALSO RESTRICT
ACCESS TO EMBASSY. BARRIERS WERE IN PLACE JAN 18.

END SUMMARY.

2. MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS PROTOCOL SECURITY OFFICER

GEORGI DAMYANOV CALLED ACTING DCM SIMPSON IN JAN 17 AT 1715 ON "EMERGENCY MATTER." DAMYANOV SAID THAT MFA HAD JUST RECEIVED INFORMATION THAT UNKNOWN GROUP OF ARAB AND AFRICAN STUDENTS WERE PLANNING DEMONSTRATION OR "PERHAPS EVEN ROUGHER ACTION" AGAINST EMBASSY. MFA DID NOT KNOW SPECIFIC REASON FOR DEMO BUT BELIEVED IT WAS QUESTION OF OUR ACTIONS IN MIDDLE EAST. GOB WAS CONCERNED ABOUT POSSIBLE DAMAGE TO EMBASSY AND POSSIBLE INFLAMED REACTION OF BULGARIAN PEOPLE TO DEMONSTRATION. GOB DID NOT WANT "SHADOW TO FALL OVER OUR GOOD RELATIONS" IN THIS WAY AND SO GOB WOULD BE TAKING SECURITY PRECAUTIONS AS A TEMPORARY MEASURE TO PREVENT SUCH AN OCCURRENCE. SPECIFICALLY, BOTH END OF BLOCK OF BLVD. ALEKSANDUR STAMBOLIYSKI, UHEN WHICH EMBASSY IS LOCATED, WOULD BE CORDONED OFF, LARGE GROUPS WOULD NOT BE PERMITTED PASSAGE AND ONLY INDIVIDUALS "WITH LEGITIMATE BUSINESS AT EMBASSY" WOULD BE ADMITTED TO AREA.

3. SIMPSON RESPONDED FIRST BY EXPRESSING THANKS FOR INFORMATION AND FOR VOB CONCERN, SHARED BY US, THAT NORMAL OPERATIONS OF EMBASSY IN NO WAY BE DISTURBED BY SUCH DISORDERS. WE HAD VIEWED WITH INTEREST AND SOME -- IN THE EVENT UNFOUNDED -- CONFIDENCE THE FACT THAT WHILE SUCH

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DISORDERS WERE OCCURRING IN SOME OTHER EASTERN EUROPEAN, MIDDLE EASTERN AND AFRICAN COUNTRIES, NOTHING OF THAT SORT HAD TAKEN PLACE IN BULGARIA. IN FACT, WE WERE A LITTLE SURPRISED THAT DAMYANOV DID NOT HAVE MORE SPECIFIC INFORMATION REGARDING THE GROUP AND ITS REASONS, SINCE IT WAS OUR GENERAL IMPRESSION THAT LITTLE MOVED IN BULGARIA WITHOUT THE VERY EFFICIENT SECURITY SERVICE BEING AWARE. BECAUSE OF THAT, WE HAD EVERY REASON TO BELIEVE THAT BULGARIAN SECURITY WOULD QUICKLY GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THE MATTER AND BE ABLE TO REMOVE THE BARRIERS. DAMYANOV MADE POINT THAT THERE WERE MANY ARAB GROUPS IN BULGARIA, MAKING SITUATION DIFFICULT TO FOLLOW. (EMBOFF RESPONDED, "EIGHTEEN, I THINK.") THEY WERE FOREIGNERS AND HENCE COULD NOT BE DEALT WITH SO EASILY. (EMBOFF RESPONDED THAT, AT SAME TIME, THEY WERE GUESTS IN BULGARIA AND SHOULD SO BEHAVE.) DAMYANOV CITED PREVIOUS CASE WHERE GROUP OF ARAB STUDENTS HAD ATTACKED SYRIAN EMBASSY JUST AFTER WITHDRAWAL OF BULGARIAN SECURITY GUARDS. SIMPSON CITED MORE RECENT CASE OF NOV 17 CONTROLLED DEMONSTRATION AGAINST EGYPTIAN EMBASSY (REF A).

4. AFTER BEING ASSURED THAT DAMYANOV'S KNOWLEDGE OF NATURE

OF THREAT DID NOT INCLUDE ANY INDICATION OF POSSIBLE
ACTIONS AGAINST AMERICAN OR BULGARIAN EMPLOYEES OF EMBASSY
PERSONALLY OR AT RESIDENCES, SIMPSON MADE POINT THAT OUR
MAIN CONCERN WAS THAT SECURITY MEASURES BE REMOVED AS SOON

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AS THREAT TO EMBASSY WAS ONCE AGAIN UNDER BULGARIAN
SECURITY'S CONTROL IN ORDER THAT NORMAL OPERATIONS OF
EMBASSY -- CONSULAR FUNCTIONS, ACCESS TO DISPLAY WINDOWS,
BUSINESS VIITORS, USE OF READING ROOM, ETC. -- NOT BE
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CURTAILED IN ANY WAY. LARGE
ROUP OF ARAB STUDENTS SHOULD
BE EASY TO KEEP TRACK OF. AS FOR POSSIBLE ESCALATORY
REACTION OF BULGARIAN PUBLIC TO DEMONSTRATION AGAINST
EMBASSY OVER MIDDLE EASTERN ISSUES, WE WOULD COUNT ON
BULGARIAN MEDIA TO PROVIDE BULGARIAN PUBLIC WITH ACCURATE
ACCOUNT OF EVENTS IN MIDDLE EAST WHERE, IN FACT,
OUR INTENTION WAS ONLY TO FACILITATE TWO SIDES ARRIVING
AT VIABLE PEACE, SURELY NOT AN INFLAMMATORY POSITION.
WE WOQUD THUS AWAIT EARLY WORD FROM THE GOB THAT EMBASSY
COULD RETURN TO "BUSINESS AS USUAL," WITHOUT OUR DISPLAY
WINDOWS CORDONED OFF AND OUR VISITORS SCREENED MORE THAN
USUAL. DAMYANOV EXPRESSED HOPE THAT MATTER WOULD QUICKLY
BE OVER, NOT LEAST OF WHICH BECAUSE OF TIE-UP OF MFA'S
QUOTA OF MILITSIAMEN, AND PROMISED TO INFORM US AS SOON
AS POSSIBLE.

5. MEETING WITH DAMYANOV ENDED AT 1815. BY 2010,
STREET WAS CORDONED OFF AND SOME FIVE MILITSIAMEN POSTED
(IN ADDITION TO NORMAL ONE IN BOOTH OUTSIDE EMBASSY).
MARINE SECURITY DETACHMENT WAS ALERTED AND EMBASSY PERSONNEL
WARNED OF POSSIBLE DEMOSTRATION. AS OF OPENING OF BUSINESS
JAN 18, BARRIERS WERE IN PLACE, CLOSER TO EMBASSY THAN AGREED
UPON, AND ONLY USUAL SINGLE MILITSIAMAN PATROLLING
PERIMETERS OF CORDON.

6. COMMENT: DESPITE THE THOROUGH GOB CONTROL
OVER ARAB STUDENTS IN BULGARIA (REF B), IT MAY BE THAT
GOB FEELS IT MUST PERMIT THEM TO DEMONSTRATE TO RETAIN
POLITICAL CREDIBILITY. (IN GENERAL, IT IS FAIR TO SAY
THAT GOB DOES NOT LIKE DEMONSTRATIONS OF ANY KIND AND
WAS QUITE EMBARR-
ASSED OVER IN:IDENT AT SYRIAN EMBASSY

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(PARA 3.) IT IS ALSO NOT PURE COINCIDENCE, HOWEVER,
THAT "NECESSARY" BULGARIAN SECURITY MEASURES INCLUDE
RESTRICTING ACCESS TO EMBASSY AND, SPECIFICALLY, PRE-
VENTING NORMAL HEAVY FLOW OF VIEWERS PAST USIS DISPLAY
WINDOWS. WE WILL WAIT A DAY OR SO AND THEN ASK MFA
RESULTS OF BULGARIAN SECURITY'S EFFORTS TO PREVENT THIS
POSSIBLE DISORDER AND, IF NOTHING ELSE, TO MOVE BARRIERS
BACK TO AGREED UPON POINT.

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
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